

THE ALLEGORY OF THE CHARIOT IN THE GITA



The **Gita** is the fundamental turning point of the Mahabharata (3,100 years BCE). Key to the Gita is the chariot. Just before the start of the war, Arjuna requests his charioteer Shri Krishna to bring the chariot in between the two army lines. Confused about the forthcoming bloodshed between the relatives - Pandavas and Kauravas, he turns to Sri Krishna for guidance.

The Gita is his response.

Decrypting the underlying philosophy of the image, we'll find principles and concepts of our existence.

1. Kurukshetra, portrays the eternal inner battle field – our minds and hearts, respectively the centers of mental and emotional activities).
2. The Two Armies refer to the Good and Evil tendencies; the first battling to uphold truth (*satya*), right (*dharma*), duties & responsibilities (*kartavya*); and the second - untruth (*asatya*), wrong (*adharma*), and negligence (*akartavya*).
3. The Chariot represents the physical body (*shareera*), the instrument through which the soul (*ātmā*), intellect (*buddhi*), mind (*mana*), and senses (*indriya*) operate.

The soul cannot perform any action without being in a physical body. In moksha-mukti it stays in the bliss (*ānand*) of Eeshvar (God)

4. The Charioteer, Shri Krishna corresponds to the inner voice or the Divine guide within us which always prompts us to engage in noble thoughts, words and deeds through awesome feelings - joy, awe, passion, enthusiasm when, and dreadful feelings - fear, doubt, shame whenever we engage on the evil path. However, the intellect (*buddhi*), supposed to be the wise giver of instructions to the mind is free to take on or discard the guidance of the inner voice.

5. The Traveller, Arjuna symbolizes the Individual Soul (*ātmā, jīva*) which is the center of consciousness, and free to choose between right (*dharma*) and wrong (*adharma*).

Surrendering ourselves to the Divine guide, and treading on the path of dharma in all our ways of doings and dealings in day-to-day life, the Divinity within us takes over the role of charioteer (as Shri Krishna did for Arjuna) - victory is certain.

6. The Wheels of the Chariot points to the Right physical and mental efforts (*purushārtha*).
7. The Reins denotes the Inner Instruments - intellect (*buddhi*), mind (*mana*), identity & ego (*ahankār*) through which the senses receive their instructions to perceive and be prudent or be reckless.
8. The Horses stands for the Senses (*indriya*) through which we relate to the external world by perception (*jñānendriya* - taste, smell, sight, hearing, touch) and action (*karmendriya* - voice, hand, feet, excretion & reproduction).

9. The Paths signifies the Numerous Objects of senses and cravings in the present world and the imprints in our memory – restraint & composure or immoderation & agitation.
10. The Destination is *Moksha-Mukti* through perfection, Self-Realization, God-Realization

What happens when we do we not follow the skillful charioteer, the Divine guide - inner voice within us?

- The reins (intellect, mind) will wag freely with disparate instructions to the horses (senses). The horses will respond only to imprints or memories of past experiences and the only goal is to satiate our cravings ...farewell to moderation, and ...welcome to indulgence and excesses.
- Ultimately, the chariot will fall into decrepitude (the body into debility);
- The reins (mind) fall apart losing hold on the horses (senses);
- The horses (sense organs) get drained, worn-out;
- The charioteer (inner voice), out of action and ignored, slumbers; and
- The passenger (soul) will not reach the scheduled destination (*moksha-mukti*).

In this daily life battle, our charioteer is always guiding us to steer on the path of dharma (righteousness). Implementing the teachings of the Gita - a fusion of *jñāna* (knowledge), *karma* (actions) and *bhakti* (dedication, following the guidance to realize righteous objectives) will add brilliance to life ...NOT by the mere parrot-like recitation of the shlokas.

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